



Klaus Simonise surveys the damage that was his home. He was on the way home with his wife and kids when the quake hit Port-au-Prince.

DISPLACED BUT NOT
DISHEARTENED
SURVIVING IN



Haiti

By Dudley M. Brooks
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It was a really great house. Overlooking a lush valley in Canopyville, a quiet neighborhood north of downtown Port-au-Prince, the home had four large rooms, two bathrooms, a garage and a separate apartment unit attached.

There was plenty of living area for a young family of four, and for 27-year-old Klaus Simonise, it was a godsend. It was a

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gift to him and his sister, Sarah. After their mother died, a family friend

wanted to make sure that they were taken care of. He and his wife previously lived with his in-laws and the relationship between them soured steadily. This was their escape, and a chance to be independent and carve out the life they always wanted for themselves in Haiti. January 12, 2010, changed all of that.

It was nearing the thick of rush hour and the couple had just picked their children up from school in the neighborhood

south. It's beautiful, really, but nothing a first-time visitor should negotiate as a motorist. Knowing the Haitian way of driving is critical, since traffic moves at a much-faster-than-needed pace and order is left to the drivers' discretion. But at peak times of the day, traffic can snarl – so you wait.

The Simonises were doing just that when Klaus' wife, Rachel, noticed rocks falling from the hillside to the road. Her first inclination was to look for the cause at the top of the hill, until every car on the road started to jump violently up and down. Everyone was confused and panic quickly set in as more rubble started pouring from the hillside, crushing everything in its path. Klaus immediately looked back at his 7-year-old Sebastien, who, naturally oblivious to the situation, happily munched on a sandwich. "Get out of the car – Now!" he said to his wife. But as they grabbed both children to run, the question was where.

By now, the road was rolling up and down like a carnival ride and Klaus could feel the ground moving beneath his feet. Panic in the street escalated as the sound of crashing concrete filled the air. Taxis full of people were crushed and trucks were overturned. At its worst, the road moved from side to side, making it difficult to negotiate. They made it to safety, as did Klaus' sister and the other members of his family, but the house they loved so much is now a pile of rubble. All they have left is their car.

A young patient waits at the tented medical center near the airport.



of Petionville, just a few miles northeast of downtown Port-au-Prince. Dalancourt Avenue, their normal route home, had its usual blockage of trucks and cars and masses of brave pedestrians. The road—one lane up and one down—cuts along the base of a hillside to the north, with a dramatic drop-off into a valley to the

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Others weren't so lucky. Much of Port-au-Prince is in ruins, with thousands of bodies still buried beneath the rubble. A death smell lirts through the air and the people of this poor, yet vibrant, city are desperate for help. Although aid is pouring in, it had not been getting to everyone because of the quake's magni-

tude. There are no specific areas where the damage is worst, since damage and destruction are everywhere. Feet and arms still hang from flattened buildings and thousands of people roam the streets. For many of them, those streets are now their homes and looting had been sporadic. Haiti is in trouble and a



An early-morning downtown street scene amid the wreckage.

huge aftershock that shook the ground just a week after the major shaker that decimated this area only added to its woes. A few buildings that hung on the edge of collapse are now down. More could be trapped or dead, and the reality for a clean restoration is years away.

Klaus and his sister have been sepa-

rated for now, but they survived—as did his entire family. It was a blessing—one that he relishes. He knows that if they'd arrived home just 20 minutes earlier, they would all be dead—a valuable testament to timing. She now lives in a military-run camp for displaced people and his family lives in a privately funded one.

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A man cheers the presence of international troops at the airport. At left, people gather for water from a relief tanker.

She may be airlifted out, but he has no intentions of leaving. "This is my home and I wanted to make a life here." That's one thing for him that won't change.

It's been said that this could be the end of Haiti – that it could never recover

without a massive international effort. The latter is true, but don't count out the sheer resilience of the Haitian people. There are a thousand ways to die here and life has always been hard. This isn't the first of Haiti's catastrophes and, considering the history of this nation, certainly not the last. But the Haitian people, strong ones, have survived them all – and they'll survive this.

DUDLEY M. BROOKS, the senior photo editor for EBONY magazine, is covering the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti from Port-au-Prince. Photos by Dudley M. Brooks.

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